

114 chiefly at Tenejapa and Cancuc. In 1925 Blom and LaFarge entered the Tzeltal country from the north, visiting Bachajón, Sivaca, Tenango, Cancuc, Tenejapa, and Amatenango. These authors have published a short general account of the culture of these people. In 1928 the John Geddings Gray Memorial Expedition of the Tulane University of Louisiana passed through the villages of Ococingo and Sivaca, and visited the hacienda "El Real." At this last place Carlos Basauri, a member of the expedition, collected notes on the Tzeltals. Marcos E. Becerra, who was for ten years head of the Department of Public Education of Chiapas, assembled information on the languages, ethnography, and history of the Indians of the highlands and of other parts of the state.¹ Dr. Ruth Bunzel has spent some time recently in the region; her materials are unpublished.

101 The Tzeltal-speaking communities may be divided into those situated in the
361 highlands (Amatenango, Chana, Tenejapa, Cancuc, Oxchuc, San Martín, and Tenango), and those situated at less than 1000 m. above sea level and that consequently enjoy a warmer climate (Sivaca, Ococingo, Bachajón, Ciralá, Guaquepec, Chilon, Yajalón, and Petalcingo).

133 In general the State of Chiapas is highly dissected and mountainous. It is crossed from east to west with three cordilleras, with subdivisions into various branches which cross with one another to form a complicated orographic system. The ranges which cross the Tzeltal region are those belonging to the Cordillera de Hueitepec, reaching an altitude of 2597 m. above sea level in a mountain of this name situated east of the city of La Casca. With the exception of some Chamula settlements, this is the settlement of greatest altitude (2110 m. above sea level)² in the entire state. From this point and continuing northward are to be found the other pueblos Villa visited. The land decreases in altitude until it reaches the Ococingo Valley where there is a sharp descent of 600 m.³ From here on, the terrain is not so dissected and the altitude is less than 1000 m. above sea level and becomes gradually less.

132 As is natural, the climates of these two zones present marked differences which
823 have given rise to the expressions "tierra fría" and "tierra caliente" by which the natives distinguish them. The former refers to the higher region where, according to Amram, "The temperature rarely falls below freezing, though in November, 1935, it dropped as low as 24° F. During the long dry period, when for weeks at a time no rain falls, the temperature in the shade occasionally rises above 75°, and the temperature in the sun may reach well over 100°. The relative humidity is low, and there are great differences between shade and sun temperatures. The nights are cool."⁴

The region of the tierra caliente begins in the Valley of Ococingo and the temperature rises as one goes northward. At Salto de Agua, 73 m. above sea level, one experiences tropical heat.

¹ Blom and LaFarge, 1927.

² *Ibid.*, 2: 406.

³ Basauri, 1931.

⁴ Becerra, 1932 and 1933.

⁵ Emeterio Pineta, 1845, p. 20. See also Waibel, 1935, pp. 64-77.

Santibañes, 1911, p. 7.

⁶ Emeterio Pineta, 1845, p. 20.

⁷ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2: 518.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2: 37.

⁹ Amram, 1937, p. 52.

[P.467-A]

Teklum

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[swayobel]." "What one?" asked his friend. "You won't be afraid?" asked J. And then he put his shirt and hat on the floor, spoke three words (my friend didn't say what), and raised his hat and shirt, and a horse appeared. He did this again and a bull appeared. He was a great *ʔak ʔamel* [witch]. He stole a great deal. He was killed by five bullets.

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Such stories of curers "who walk on both sides" (*ʔbeʔen la ʔa mehl*) are favorites in the drinking sessions of Teklum. The power of curers inspires fear, so much so that some of the town presidents have been afraid of putting them in prison.

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The open competition between curers serves to undermine the faith of the people in their guardianship function. This function was believed to have been acquired by the leaders from the *meʔtiklatik*, the ancestors, who were said to live in a cave in a hill near the town, from which came the progenitors of the present townspeople. To carry out this guardianship function, the animal spirits of the two leading curers roamed the streets at night, when the evil spirits were out, each one remaining within the limits of his own side of the dual division. In this role, the two major curers were called the *meʔiklatiletik*, a term derived from the one referring to the ancestors.

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The loss of faith in the guardianship function of the curers was coincident with the loss of belief in the presence of the *meʔtiklatik*. Some deny that the *meʔtiklatik* live in the cave anymore, and others say they just appear on the day of their fiesta, the Day of the Cross in the Catholic calendar. This fiesta formerly was an important event in establishing the guardian power of the leader curers, since they were the only ones who dared enter the cave and talk to the ancestors. But this fear and this belief have gone. In 1960 one young man of the pueblo entered the cave on the day of the fiesta, when the curers were "deceiving the people" in claiming that they were talking to the ancestors, the fact that he dared enter the cave indicates an ambient distrust (in part resulting from verbal attacks by the priest, who at that time was gaining more power in the town). By now, on the Day of the Cross the church and civil officials, the women praymakers, and an assistant of the priest, the *fiscal*, go to the cave, but the curers are no longer present, even as bystanders. The curers have tried to buttress belief in the guardianship of the ancestors by claiming that a nephew of the ancestors is now in residence in

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9. The Tzeltal

ALFONSO VILLA ROJAS

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OCCUPYING A REGION east of the Tzotzil, the Tzeltal live in the central part of the state of Chia-

- 133 pas, Mexico. Three natural zones divide this land: gentle slopes and plains in the south (Amatenango del Valle, Aguacate-nango, Pinola, Soyatitan, and Socoltenan-go); high peaks and irregular terrain in the central part (Chanal, Oxchuc, Tenejapa, Cancuc, Abasolo, and Tenango); lower peaks toward the north.

GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY

13

Vegetation varies with climate and altitude. In the temperate or cold lands, evergreen oaks and pines predominate; in the lower and warm areas are high evergreen forests, alternating with savannas and subdeciduous forest (F. Miranda, 1952, vol. 1, ch. 3). In

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the temperate and the warm zones coffee and a great variety of fruit trees—orange, annona, peach—are cultivated.

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Few rivers of any volume cross the mountainous terrain. None are navigable. The hydrographic system is delimited by the Usmacinta and Grijalva rivers; the former

[P.195-A]

9. The Tzeltal

ALFONSO VILLA ROJAS

133 flows through the eastern part of the region, the latter through the western, both draining large basins.

161 According to the census of 1950 the pop-
162 ulation of the zone totals 76,617 individuals, distributed over 15,970 sq. km. Of these 49,053 persons are Indian, 27,564 are Ladino. This population is distributed according to Table 1.

[128] San Cristobal de las Casas is omitted from the table because its population is predominantly Ladino (19,755 individuals) and because the Indians who live there (3,296) are of the Tzotzil tongue. Socoltenango and Nicolas Ruiz are also omitted because they no longer have an Indian-speaking population.

161 The central region has the municipalities
631 of the highest density of population: Oxchuc with 129 inhabitants per sq. km., and Tene-

[134] japa with 115. The northern part has an area seven times as large with only twice as much population; the municipality of Ocosingo has hardly one inhabitant per sq. km. in spite of the fact that its lands are the most fertile of the entire region. Although it

[p. 195-B]
TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 196-B]

5: Blom & LaFarge

NV9 Tzeltal NV9

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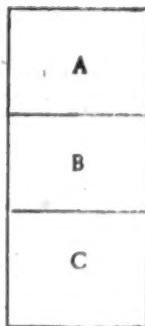


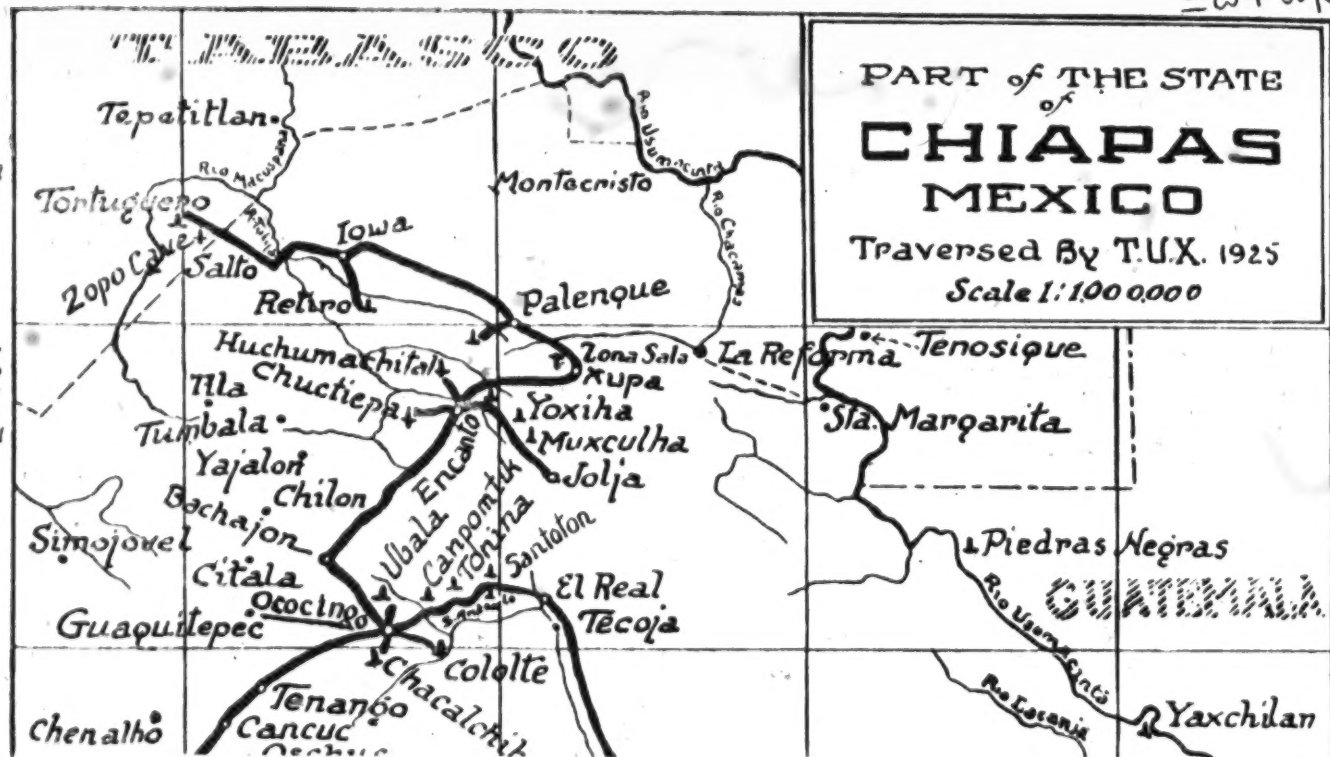
Chart of Positions of Map

Facing p. 239

[facing p. 239]

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[Facing p. 239A]





5: Blom & LaFarge A, E-4, 5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

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[Facing p. 239, C]

PY
172 by the great forest. New cities, one after the other, sprang up in
174 the new country. Several tribes stayed behind, but the leaders and
131 chiefs must have gone north. The tribes still living in the southern
167 area are descendants of those who remained.
361

PY
174 Several explanations have been advanced for this migration,
167 among which are disease, war, and change of climatic conditions.
24 Probably there are many reasons for the exodus, of which the ex-
haustion of the soil is one of the principal.

PY
131 The Maya could have gone south. There they would have
167 found igneous mountains. We find Maya speaking tribes in the
174 highlands of Guatemala, but rarely find great buildings in that
135 area. To the north, on the peninsula of Yucatan, the migrants
241 found a limestone country, much like that which they had left.
Limestone played a principal role in their whole culture. Lime
was necessary for making their principal food, the corn cake (now
called tortilla by the Spaniards). Limestone was easy to cut and
carve with stone tools, and burnt lime was essential in their temple
building. Moreover, the agricultural conditions were similar to
those to which they were accustomed. Therefore, after two centuries
of moving around, searching for a suitable place, they settled in
Yucatan. There they built more great cities, and blossomed out in
a magnificent renaissance, finally to reach the climax and then came
the downfall of their entire culture.

T
361 Now and then we met a few Indians, but only when we reached
the high points of the trail did we see their houses in places of van-
tage on the hills, away from the trail, so that the inhabitants could
look out for strangers.

T
114 Reaching a steep climb, we dismounted and drove our animals
along, urging them with Indian cries. The pack animals laboured
under their burden, frequently stopping to get their wind, then
driven forward again by the yells and whistling of the boys.

T
• 133 The trail went straight over the ridge, from the top of which we
137 had a magnificent view of the valley of the *Ruchil* and *Bolontichná*
114 rivers. Below we heard the roar of the rivers, and in front lay the
nearly vertical wall of the southern side of the valley, an enormous
geological fault. Along the backbone of a long narrow ridge we
could see our trail winding up to the edge of the wall miles ahead.
Nowhere in the huge valley at our feet did we see big forest; all
was second growth and patches of grass.

T
133 Shortly after noon we had crossed the two rivers, and continued
114 the gradual climb towards the southern rim. As we ascended we
[361]

BACHAJON COUNTRY

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saw houses and fields, lying away from the trail, and at a bend before us in the distance a perpendicular wall of yellow and red rock, about 400 meters high, framed in green foliage. A vertical, shining white band, the waterfall "Chegua," cut the center of the red cliff.

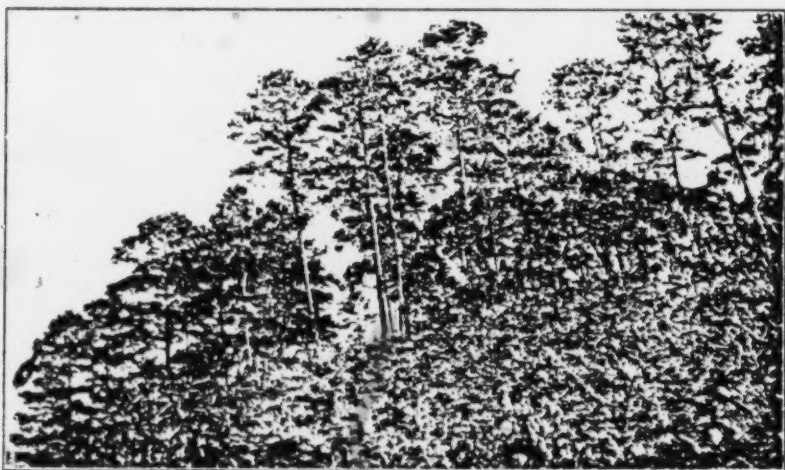
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Toward evening we made camp by a small stream not far below the rim of the valley, 980 meters above sea level, and rolled ourselves in our blankets just as a downpour started to drum on our tent-fly.

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Early in the morning a few Bachajon Indians came stealthily out of the bush to look at our strange outfit. They talked with our Indian carriers, and evidently found out that we were not bad people, as they soon came near to our camp to talk with us.

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FIG. 195—Bachajon, Chiap. Pine Forest.

It was a cool morning and the bottom of the valley was hidden under great soft banks of white mists with the mountains appearing above in sharp silhouette against the morning sky. Soon we reached the rim of the valley and looking back towards the north, saw the many mountain ranges we had crossed and also the Don Juan mountain along the foot of which we rode towards Palenque.

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The vegetation changed to low oak-like bush over ground covered with fern-like moss and pretty wild iris. As we rode downward to the next valley new mountain ranges appeared before us and we could see the pine country at a distance. There is no transition from tropical vegetation to pine forest. Change in soil is

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132 Change in soil is
134 probably the reason for change in vegetation. The tropical forest grows on black humus soil and the pine country is underlain by a red sandstone which weathers into a heavy red clay. The contact of this sandstone with the limestone country on which leaf trees grow lies about an hour's ride north of the village of Bachajon.

• [133] The pine country is very hilly, the trees are scattered over a carpet of vivid green grass cut by the strong red line of the soil of the trail like a scar (fig. 195).

114 It was like riding through a magnificent park, up and down the hills and across small streams. Our poor animals had a hard time on the slippery trail. La Farge's horse gave out, and he had to change his saddle to a spare animal.

361 The Bachajon Indian village came in sight, lying on a hill in the
342 middle of the valley. It was well after noon when we reached the
346 dilapidated, grass-roofed and mud-walled huts clustered around the huge ruin of an old Spanish stone church. The Indians use a new church which they have built of the same material as their houses.

122 The house of the Government agent lies in the middle of the
344 village and here we were quartered in a room, the floor of which had just been covered with a carpet of fresh pine needles.

123 The Bachajon Indians are reputed to be unfriendly to all travelers, so we were not surprised when the Indian chief of the village told us that he could not furnish fodder for our animals or men to carry some of our cargo. To all our questions he answered "Mayuk," or in English, "Ain't got none." But when the chief, a little later, heard from our Encanto men that we had been friendly to them, and that furthermore, we were friends of the big father President in Mexico City, he changed his attitude.

648 The Government agent is sent to the Indian village by the civil
[651] authorities of the neighbouring Mexican town of Ocosingo. He is
[653] supposed to collect certain taxes, raise labourers for public works in the Mexican town, and help the Indians with their affairs. He is highly unpopular among the Indians, who counteract his orders through a remarkable system of passive resistance. They say "yes" to everything and do nothing. The only reason the Indians tolerate [273] him is because he keeps a small store and sells liquor. The Indian is very fond of sugar-cane rum, and every Saturday and Sunday all the villagers generally get drunk. The agent complained bitterly [123] that the Indians were not selling him any food supplies and was astonished when they sold us chickens and eggs.

361 Most of the Bachajon Indians live hidden away in the bush. Only the families of the chief and the village officials live around the old church ruins.

BACHAJON TOWN

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the old church ruins. The chief and the officials all spoke Spanish, but the only one who knew how to read and write was the town secretary, a 15-year old boy.

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After dark the Indians gathered in front of the municipal house and presently some of the elders made signs that they wanted to talk to us. We followed them into the dark out of earshot of the agent, where the Indians told us of all their sorrows and difficulties, asking if we could not help them. They said that the agent tried to raise unjust taxes, that they were forced to do much work for the Municipal President of Ocosingo and did not have time to look after their own corn fields, and also that they were molested by the managers of the neighbouring properties. They asked us to bring their complaints before the Central Government, which we have done.

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From there our route followed the main trail, or Camino Real, between Chilon and Ocosingo. A few hours ride through pine forest brought us to the top of a pass from where we had a magnificent view over the Ocosingo Valley. We could see the Indian village of Sivacá, and the white walled, red tiled houses of the Mexican town Ocosingo, lying on a green carpet of extensive grazing land. Down over the mountain side we scrambled towards the valley bottom, and by noon the hoofs of our animals clattered against the cobbled stones of Ocosingo's streets.

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CHAPTER XII

THE OCOSINGO VALLEY

The name Ocosingo is Aztec, signifying the "Place of Pines," ¹⁰³
a name well chosen, for the valley is enclosed in pine-clad hills. ¹³⁷
When one stands at the southwestern end of the valley it stretches ¹³³
out in front like a huge natural stadium with the high San Martín
mountain lying at the back. The northern and southern sides of the
valley consist of two parallel rows of mountains, the inner rows be-
ing lower than the outer. The interior ranges slope towards the
valley and turn nearly vertical cliff walls towards the very narrow
valleys that separate them from the exterior mountains (fig. 196).

The interior ranges are broken up in many points, and this the ¹³³
Maya took advantage of, selecting the highest points for pyramids. ¹⁷²

The floor of the valley is grass covered, with scattered groups of ¹³⁷
pine trees. Here and there lie ranches, mostly inhabited by Mex- ³⁶¹
icans, called Ladinos here. The Ladino is, strictly speaking, a man ⁸²⁹
of mixed Indian and Spanish blood, but the Indians use the term to
indicate any Mexican or Spaniard who lives in a town or owns a
larger ranch. With the name generally goes a certain amount of
education, and the ability to read and write.

Ocosingo town now contains only about 500 inhabitants, living ⁰⁰⁰
in whitewashed brick houses with red tiled roofs. In the center of
the town is a Plaza, at one end of which lies the Palacio Municipal,
and at the other end a huge Spanish Colonial church. In front of
the church is the public fountain; the water and news supply of the
town. All day long girls come here to fill large clay jugs with cool
water, led down from the San Martín mountain through an under-
ground canal.

Half of the Plaza is planted with trees, which surround a dilapi-
dated music pavilion, without which no self-respecting Mexican vil-
lage could exist.

The houses that face the Plaza all have colonnades where one
may walk in the shade, and where families bring their rocking chairs
in the evenings to sit and watch the crowds of as many as twenty-five
men and women who walk around the pavilion, or to look at the
horses and cows that feed on the grass growing exuberantly be-
tween the paving stones of the Plaza.

The Ocosingo Valley and many smaller valleys adjoining for- ²³³
merly supported large herds of cattle and had considerable trade. ⁴³

[Text continues on p. 247]

OCOSINGO VALLEY

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Revolutions have since destroyed the herds, and the town now has only a small local trade in sugar and rum.

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All goods are transported on mule-back over bad trails. Main trails run to Yajalon, San Cristóbal las Casas, and Comitán. Minor trails connect with Tenosique in Tabasco, a ride of five or six days through uninhabited forests. Other small trails lead into the heart of the forests along the Usumacinta river, where there are a few mahogany camps, fourteen days distance on a good mule.

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The Spanish Conquerors had quickly discovered the richness of the soil and taken possession of it. Therefore, we find but a few Indians around Ocosingo, save at the small town of Sivacá, entirely inhabited by Tzeltal-speaking Indians. From there we secured our labourers, who were summoned by the municipal president and worked for us at the regulation pay of 50 centavos per day. Ocosingo holds sway over the native towns of Sivacá, Tenango, Oshuc, San Martín, and Bachajon. The municipality commands the Indians for all kinds of work, and in many ways lives on what can be pressed from them. As a consequence, the good people of Ocosingo are anything but popular among the Indians, though it appears that the man then in charge, Señor Simon Leon, was quite friendly towards them, and therefore well liked.

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Geologically, the Ocosingo Valley is a syncline, the valley bottom and the interior mountain ranges being of a coarse red sandstone, and the exterior ranges of limestone. The axis of the valley runs approximately N-80-W to S-80-E, and Ocosingo town is located at an altitude of 900 meters above sea level.

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As we rode into the village, La Farge discovered a stone block, carved with hieroglyphs, set in the pavement of the sidewalk, an excellent reception for archaeologists.

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Our first concern was to find quarters, which we located in a house on the corner of a street leading into the Plaza. Soon our equipment was unloaded, and while we unpacked, the Ladino guide we had acquired in Bachajon went to his house to order food for us.

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The restaurant and meal were a surprise, though not pleasant. In a room with a rotten board floor, the plaster falling off the walls, and a huge box full of saints, we were served fried eggs and black beans by an old woman with a large goitre. Though nothing in the house appeared to be either particularly exclusive or clean, the Ladino family seemed to resent that we sat down at the table with our chief guide, the trusty old Indian, Lázaro, now called "Tata" by us.

123 able when broken by the clattering of horses hoofs against the paving stones.

172 From the Plaza one can see a great part of the valley and sur-
114 rounding mountains. When the sun in the morning falls on the San Martín mountain, one's attention is attracted by a spur on this mountain which strongly resembles a pyramid. We asked about this and were told that it actually was an ancient mound. Therefore, one morning, we rode to the foot of the San Martín.

Reaching a small ranch, we left our horses behind and ascended on foot. A spur of the mountain had in ancient times been levelled and shaped to the form of an immense truncated pyramid, rising in terraces.

778 We had heard that there were caves in the mountainside, and
114 that every year, on the 3rd of May, the Indians come here to worship the god of the mountain. Soon we reached a small cave, or rock shelter, and upon entering saw that a tunnel led into the dark. This we followed, with lighted candles, into a small cave, and there on the floor we found signs of a small altar.*

We took great pains not to disturb anything on the altar, returning to the mouth of the cave, and emerged into the glaring sunlight. We then climbed to the top of the pyramid, and found a large level area in the center of which stood a small mound. On top of the mound Indians had erected a wooden cross and at its foot we found bunches of pine needles, also remnants of burnt copal incense. Evidently this also was a place of Indian worship.

114 Sitting on top of the mound we had the whole Ocosingo valley
133 at our feet. The red roofs of the town lay 500 meters below us.
172 The top of the pyramid, called Chacalchib, is 1,440 meters above
361 sea level. Far away we could see two other hilltops that likewise had been turned into pyramids. On the northern edge of the valley lay Campontik, and further away on the same side we could distinguish the ruins of Toniná. On the southern side of the valley was the mountain-pyramid called Cololté. All these places were later visited.

133 The valley floor spread out before us. Here and there lay small
137 ranches, and patches of pine forest. Several groups of mounds were
361 easily distinguished, as those of Santa Teresa just outside Ocosingo
172 on the trail to Bachajon. At the head of the valley lay Sivacá, the Indian village.

172 On the level top of the pyramid were rows of stones, indicating
114 old house foundations, but though we made a careful search, we found no monuments.

*For Description, see Chapter XV.

ANCIENT ALTAR

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Slowly we descended towards the valley, enjoying the magnificent view. The country we were to work in for the following weeks lay before us like a map. About half-way down we encountered another cave, in which we also found an Indian altar. This time the offerings were placed before a small cross, crudely made of wood. 778 114

La Farge, as usual, was busy collecting data on the Indians' life and customs, and while he paid a visit to the village Sivacá, the writer set out to explore the Cololté pyramid, sometimes called Hocuchupac, which was said to have a stone idol on it. We also heard that the good inhabitants of Ocosingo were afraid to go to the mountain top, not knowing what the Indians might do. 114 172 [26] 778



FIG. 200—Cololté, Chiá. Altar on top of the Cololté Pyramid.

Our local guide was eventually persuaded to take me to the ranch of a Ladino boy, by name Cenón, on whose property the pyramid was located. 172 114

From Ocosingo we rode along the Rio Grande de la Virgen until it joined the Jataté River, which we crossed and soon came to the ranch of Cenón, who was in the field, but came out when we called. Though the pyramid, as stated, was on his property, he was not eager to take me to it, and when he finally agreed, he first armed himself with an old 30-30 Winchester. 778 133 172

Following long, narrow, pine ridges we approached the pyramid. It was beautiful country with scattered pine and grass below. [37] 172

- 133 Finally we reached the foot of a steep hill, on top of which the idol
778 was supposed to be. This hill sloped gradually towards the north
172 and the valley. Its southern side was a vertical cliff wall. It was
difficult to climb to the top as the ground was slippery underfoot
from its carpet of pine needles, but it was well worth the trouble.
We reached the top, and there before us stood a small altar, built
of rough stones (fig. 200). On the centre of the altar stood the
idol, a small figure, 64 cm. high, carved out of yellow sandstone, and



Fig. 200—Cololté, Chic. Altar on top of the
Cololté Pyramid.

of the same type as those idols we had already seen, and knew to come from Toniná. The idol was badly weathered—only its sandaled feet were distinguishable. It was without a head, and had no carved hieroglyphs. Before it stood crude clay bowls in which were the charred remains of copal incense; rows of crude candlesticks were planted between the stones; and offerings of coloured strips of paper and small bunches of pine needles lay scattered around.

Four hundred years of Spanish rule, four hundred of Catholic missionizing, had not been able to stamp out the worship of the ancient gods in the ancient way. Here I stood, the first white man to behold this altar, a white man with a deep interest in the ancient history of this country. I could not help feeling that the ancient gods were still living, and that

- I was nearer to the ancient times at that moment than I had ever
172 been before. As I turned and saw just across the valley the mighty
pyramids of Campomtik, and Toniná, the powerful city that once
ruled over the valley, I realized that before me lay buried the ruins
of a small State within the huge Maya area—a State born of Maya
culture, using Maya hieroglyphs, speaking a Maya dialect, but at
the same time expressing itself through its art in a way distinct
from any other part of the Maya area.

CAMPOMTIK PYRAMID

255

We have divided Maya history in two groups, the Old Empire¹⁷⁵ and the New Empire. Of the history of the New Empire we know¹⁷⁴ a considerable amount, but our knowledge of the Old Empire history is scant. We know the area in which it flourished as a whole, like knowing Greece without being aware of Sparta, Athens, and Corinth. Here in front of me lay one of the first hints of the subdivisions of the Old Empire. Knowledge will advance, and soon we shall be able to tell about the rise and decline of states and cities, to revive the history of the foremost people of ancient America.

Nearly due north across the valley lies the Campomtik pyramid.¹⁷² La Farge visited it while we worked at Toniná. It, too, is a remodeled mountain top, and as it is covered with grass, it stands out sharply against the forest-clad hills. It consists of a series of terraces with a depression which has stone-faced terraces and floor. From the valley bottom the hill rises 280 meters, of which 10.5 meters (325 feet) have been terraced. Broken pottery is found in various places on the hillside, and on the top now stands two wooden crosses, set there by the Indians. The name Campomtik means "much yellow incense." Incense was burned on the hilltop until quite recently. At such times they burned great fires, and shot off many rockets bought in Ocosingo. Finally the celebrations got too fervent for the Catholic Father, and he had the Indians driven away by the town officials. Generally, though, the Padres let the Indians alone when they celebrate in honour of the ancient gods (fig. 201).¹⁷³

Outside Ocosingo, where the trail divides, one going to Bachajon,¹⁷² the other to Sivacá, lies a group of mounds called Santa Teresa. Rumors that Indians had buried church treasures here after an uprising, led the townspeople to make a large excavation. According to some people in Ocosingo, they found a small wooden sanctuary, and a beautiful clay bowl with a fish on its lid. This bowl later was bought by Seler.*

It is remarkable how persistent are rumors of buried treasures.¹²³ Every Ladino expects to find "dinero," money, in any mound, and they are usually sadly disappointed. Also, most of these people believe that we find money, else why should we dedicate so much time to our explorations? We had a case where one man offered to go fifty-fifty with us if we would explore a mound on his lands. The whole mound at Santa Teresa has been dug through, and it is told in Ocosingo that the excavators found, not money, but a small wooden sanctuary with a saint inside. We hear every day, when among the Ladinos and Mexicans, stories of church bells of solid gold, and cocks that crow at midnight on top of the mounds.¹⁷²

*Seler, E., 1901. Fig. 279.

The country near the village has been farmed out long ago; now the fields lie at a distance in the jungle. After every concentration, the Indians drift away again like blown smoke. Today most of the houses are rotten, sagging, with gaping doors. The paths are grown up with weeds, huge, old moss-covered crosses lean at crazy angles by the main trails. Over all broods the frame of the sacked church, huge stone walls with rank vegetation around them, and a twisted,

unhealthy oak-tree on one side, like a composition by Piranesi.

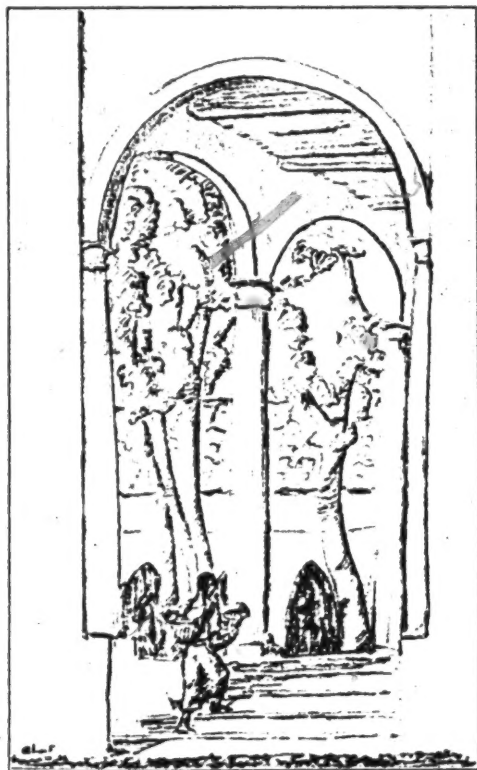


FIG. 277—Ocosingo, Chis. Colonnade on the Plaza.

Ocosingo Valley and its neighbours furnish a transition towards the real highlands. The valleys are fertile and green, ringed in with ranges of steep, rich hills. The soil in the lower parts is light; here palms and pines grow together, with a luxuriance of rich grass that makes an ideal grazing country. Through the valleys are large and small ranches of Ladinos and old Spanish families. The bigger ones, such as San Antonio, Quechil, and Achin in the Ocosingo Valley, San José Reforma and El Real beyond the San José Pass, and Tecojá in its own valley, each has a village of Indian labourers attached to them. The natives' houses are rather

better than the average, and often tile-roofed (fig. 278). The Indians of each ranch function more or less as a tribe, governed by the owner of the ranch, conducting their own worship at its chapel. A few Indians own scattered, independent farms. Sivacá (*sivak* ha', "Gunpowder Water"), near Ocosingo on the trail to Tenango, is a true village, self-governing, with its own *alcalde*, under the supervision of a Ladino *maestro*. All these groups come together at

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CHAPTER XVI

THE HIGHLAND TZELTAL

On the Fourth of July we left Ocosingo for the last stretch in to this fabled city of San Cristóbal, about which we had so long been hearing, up into the real mountains, the country of the highland tribes. We thought to spend the day in quiet travel, without fireworks, but our animals had other ideas. El Viejito, the old, white horse, led off by giving out under his pack right at the start. Then the bay mare cut loose, distributing her load over several acres. 114

The celebration finally being calmed, we reached Sivacá, at the foot of the long climb. The men who knew us were away in the fields. A few frightened women misdirected us as best they could, the animals got loose again among the orange trees and winding paths, and it was another half hour before, to the accompanying enthusiastic squeals of the local pigs, we finally got them rounded up and on the right way.

Right behind Sivacá the trail stands up on end to climb the first of the series of ramparts that lie like a defense about the highland country. It was very much like trying to ride up a gutter on the side of a house. The narrow trail was also the bed of a feeble brook. It was worn so deep that the packs rubbed along the sides. We pushed and pulled and tugged. There was the usual repetition of fallen horses and packs to be put on again. Thus for two hours, slipping and scrambling, until at last we came to a level place where an old wooden cross, decorated with offerings of flowers marked the top of the pass—1,660 meters, 600 meters (about 1,900 feet) above Ocosingo. From there on, as our trail dipped and rose along the uneven plateau, we had occasional glimpses through the tall fir trees back to the ranges behind Ocosingo Valley, and far over the hills of the Tzendales and the Lacandone country, looking very cool and blue. The trees were fine, and widely spaced; below were good grass, patches of pine-needles, and scars of red earth. We followed a succession of ridges, not very notable in themselves, but tiring to the animals after their long climb and earlier celebrations. In the late afternoon it grew cooler, and stimulated by that, and the beauty of the country, we did not know that we were weary. 114 133 • 137

One of the pack animals, a game little sandy-coloured pony with a Roman nose, who drew his neck back like a camel's when he traveled, was making better time than the rest. So Blom, on his 114

114 mule Borrachito, took him ahead, planning to get into Tenango
early and arrange for food and lodging. They went along briskly
enough for a while, leaving the pack train well behind. Then the
pony stopped, lowered his nose to the ground, blew a moment, and
keeled over. There was nothing for it but to unpack him and wait
114 for help. By and by an Indian turned up. Blom hailed him in
123 Tzeltal, "La!"—"come here!" He took cover and disappeared.
Two more came along the trail, stopped at a distance to look him
over, and also disappeared. After a while an Indian's head popped
up for an instant behind a stone. All this was rather disconcerting,
here in the Indian country, and he had noted that one of the Indians
carried a thing that looked like a cleaver on the end of a long pole.
He moved over to the mule, hiding his revolver side so that the In-
dians should not notice that he carried no fire-arms, and put him-
self in reach of his machete. A head stuck out again from behind
a tree. Then two more Indians came down the trail, whom he hailed,
asking them to carry the pack boxes into town. At first they re-
fused, but after looking for a long time at his mule, they accepted
the job. So he continued peacefully towards Tenango. He came
into the open valley just before dusk, with the shadow of the further
mountains just on the village, and the mountains themselves dark
blue and black under tremendous thunder-clouds. The men and
women were all trailing in from their cornfields, with their hoes and
machetes over their shoulders. Some stopped a moment to stare at
him, then went on, moving with slow steps over the cultivated land.

When La Farge and Lazaro came out into the cleared land, the
valley was deep in purple shadow. They reached the Cabildo after
dark, too tired to take notice of anything.

Early the next morning, while wisps of cold, silver and pink
mist still lay in the valley, the village elders gathered to welcome us,
bringing two chickens as presents. They said that they had heard
of us already, and would show us through the village. In return
for all this, we were to report to the *Tata Presidente* in Mexico that
they needed more land, and were hard put to it to find food through-
out the year for the 135 families of the village. At first we were
escorted by the whole group, from the Village President down to
the Secretary, who was illiterate and spoke little or no Spanish.
Later, most of the elders lost interest and trailed off, but we always
had enough of a delegation to ensure us good service. It was Sun-
day, so no one was working in the fields, yet we saw remarkably few
people, the women, especially, keeping within their houses most of
the time.

• 133 As has been said, Tenango lies in the eastern part of a wide val-
ley that slopes down from the eastern ridge until it meets an abrupt.

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 380]

- 133 green wall away to the westward. Midway, there is a break in the slope, with a dramatic splash of deep red cliffs, in violent contrast to the fertile grass and soft tones of the limestone outcrops. Only 241 the upper end of this valley belongs to Tenango, so little, in fact that the inhabitants cannot practice the usual, sprawling milpa system of agriculture. The very yards are planted, and the fields 351 start almost in the village, radiating from it in a close patchwork as in Europe. Everything is fenced with roughly split planks set 417 on end, and fences line the road into Tenango where it passes 361 through the cornfields. The houses with their yards lie close about an open plaza in which are the grey bones of a ruined church, a

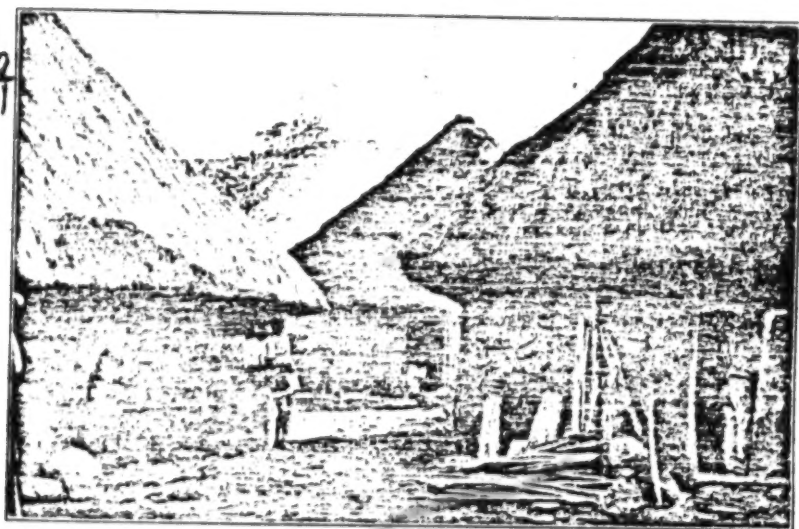


FIG. 812—Tenango, Chi. Houses.

- 361 whitewashed, palm-roofed native one, and the shack of a Cabildo for 245 the Maestro. The streets are lined with useful trees, oranges, gourds, 363 and a few bananas, which do poorly at this altitude.
- 342 The houses are square and well-made with walls of broad, split planks covered with mud (figs. 811-812). The roofs are steeply thatched and pyramidal, or have a short ridge along which broken pots are laid after the manner of tiles. The frame-work differs from that described in the last chapter in having cross-pieces laid between 354 the plates. There are no chimneys, the smoke is allowed to seep through the thatch, keeping out vermin and making the roofs steam like a clam-bake.

CANCUC VILLAGE

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boulders with care. It still is broad in most places, and has reason-
able grades. We climbed to a rather desolate upland of wind-swept
grass with a few crooked trees. There was some traffic on the road.
We passed a group of Tenejapeños going down to the hot country
to carry sugar. The men were ragged and woolly, like those we had
seen at Salto de Agua, and their women, in short blue skirts and
white blouses gorgeously ornamented with gold and crimson silk,
were remarkable for their very pink cheeks showing through dark
brown colouring.

The town of Cancuc (*kank'uk*) lies on the rounded shoulder of
a long ridge that juts up above the high moors commanding a tremen-
dous view North, West, and South over a jumbled mass of
mountain ranges, like a herd of great elephants shouldering away
to the horizon. A wind blows day and night, the trees are small and
stunted, and the general effect is one of bleakness and height. At
an altitude of 1,440 meters, with the unrelenting wind, it is always
cold. The highroad climbs from a ravine up into the village where
a small plaza is laid out on a level place. On our left was the big,
white church, still well preserved. Opposite it, the Cabildo sur-
prised us, a neat building with tile roof and white columned portico,
built in President Diaz' time. Round about were some tumbling and
ruined huts, and behind, the village rose on rough terraces crudely
faced with stone.

Cancuc has a stormy history. It was the center of the famous
rebellion of 1712, the subject of Brinton's "Maria Candelaria."*
According to Starr (1904) who passed through here, there is a tra-
dition that the men's long hair, covering their ears, is so worn in
memory of the clipped ears which their ancestors received at that
time. Recently, there has been political dissension in the form of
a dragging feud, and a series of small fights and murders has re-
sulted in those left of the defeated party abandoning the village and
setting up their houses in the bush. It is from this that one sees
so many huts deserted and beginning to disintegrate, adding to the
general cheerless aspect of the place.

We were well received at the Cabildo, where the village officials
with their silver-headed canes turned up shortly to look us over.
They were younger men than most of the officials we had met
previously, and a pretty tough looking crew, much what one would
expect of a group that had attained office largely by means of the
machete. The people on the whole rather resemble the Bachajon
physically, being of a small-limbed type with an average height for
men of about 160 centimeters, and nearly beardless. The men wear
tunics cut as at Tenango, but decorated with red and yellow em-

*Brinton, 1897; Pineda, 1888.

From Cancuc the road falls slowly away, then it climbs to the steep side of the ridge and at last dips precipitously to a covered bridge over a narrow ravine. All along on both sides little cornfields alternate with second growth. Ahead, the same great palisade that we saw from Tenango rises in a green wall, patched with fields and broken here and there by outcrops of cliffs and hanging valleys. We passed a dribbling of traffic, Indians on foot, and at the bridge met a family of Mexicans noisily eating a picnic lunch. The ravine was deep, rock-walled, with a roaring stream in the shadows of the bottom. From the other side of it the palisade rose immediately, looking almost perpendicular and indefinitely high to us as we contemplated it. The road assumed a stiff grade, rising in a series of zig-zags that gained painfully to the top. Straight up, almost like a ruled line, lay the Indian trail, taking no account of the twists and turns of the road. Our carriers from Cancuc, who took on the cargo that the Tenango men had carried the day before, had gone up that fearsome climb. We tried it, but the horses slid and fell back on their haunches, and we ourselves could barely keep our footing. So we continued along the road, turning and turning, seeming never to gain, and fearing that our animals would never make it. The heat of the sun was thrown back by the hillside and the road.

We toiled on. Low growth and brush on the side of the road gave no shade. The dust rose high. The air, for all the heat, began to have a pleasant crispness that reminded us of high altitudes in other countries. Then we smelt a familiar smell which we ignored until its persistent recurrence forced us to look, see, and believe—that blackberries grow wild in Chiapas! The event of the next hours amused Lazaro greatly, for here in Mexico we found ourselves among familiar northern flowers and wild fruits, buttercups, dandelions, wild roses, blackberries, strawberries, all strange to him. We passed an Indian farm, stuck into a tiny hanging valley, where peach trees and alligator pears were growing together in the cornfield.

At the top of the pass in a shallow V-shaped cut, the barometer read 2,100 meters, a climb of 600 meters—about 1,900 feet—in two hours.

The country changed beyond here to steep ravines, high cliffs, rushing, cold brooks, and tall, dark fir trees clothing the rocks. The tilled fields disappeared, the scattered houses, and stick fences. It was a wild, shaggy country—a perfect setting, we thought, for the home of the rough Tenejapeños that we had seen along the road.

Near evening, a road forked off to the right, leading to a split in a wall of high cliffs through which we could see, already dark with

- 133 shadow, another wall far behind. A Mexican told us that Tene-
133 japa lay in the valley thus enclosed. With the cool evening air our
114 animals picked up, taking us along at a good trot. We swung
around a green dell, up under one cliff into the opening, over the
threshold of a ridge. Some Indians sitting there waved to us. Be-
yond was a tiny, lush meadow and a brook where some Mexicans
were making clay tiles. There was another rocky hillcock, around
which we swung to find ourselves trotting down a well-cobbled
street lined with little white cottages, white-walled gardens, and
361 roses. To us, looking for something yet wilder than the villages we
had seen, the neat houses and candle-lit casement windows, the doors
of tiny shops, the flowers, and the shingled roofs were an utter sur-
prise. In the streets was a sprinkling of touselled-headed Indians

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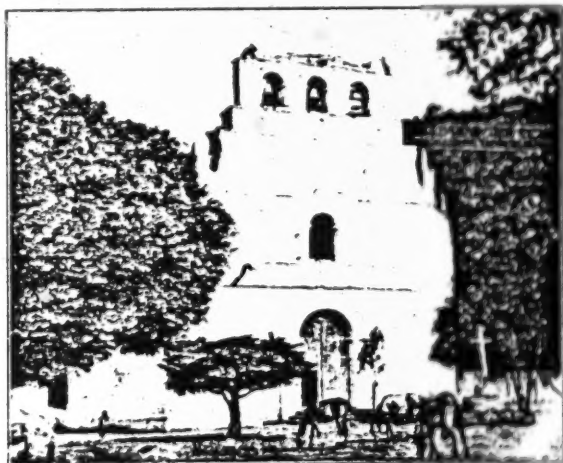


FIG. 328—Tenejapa, Chis. Church and Plaza.

- and Ladino people of much fairer complexion than the typical,
Lowland Mexicans. We rode past a gaunt, high-shouldered stone
church into the plaza, a field of about two acres planted with a few
trees, and with a fine town fountain of icy water in the middle (fig.
344 328). Along one side ran the Cabildo, a long, one-storied building
531 with a very deep veranda, gorgeously painted in cubist fashion, red,
123 yellow, green and blue. Here we halted to unpack and present our
credentials to the *Presidente Municipal*.

- 361 Tenejapa is really two towns in one. There is the Ladino town,
563 around which lie the houses of some eight thousand Indians, by local

000 total. The altitude above sea level varies from 2,000 meters in the hilly periphery to 1,720 meters in the valley where the town center is located. Ejido lands acquired in the 1930s have extended the boundaries of the township to lower lands at 1,500 meters altitude.

Pre-Conquest settlement patterns in the Chiapas highlands were characterized by independent communities occupying the headlands around flat-bottomed valleys (R. M. Adams 1961:341). The choice of sites seems to have been based on defense against invading Toltec or other conquest groups (Calnek 1962:25). The sites investigated by Adams and Culbert (R. M. Adams 1961:347) in Amatenango belong to the late-Classic and early post-Classic period. They were marginal to the centers of Maya civilization in the Yucatán peninsula and Guatemala. Test excavations in the modern town indicate that it was occupied only after colonial times.

The town of Amatenango del Valle is first mentioned in the year 1528 when it was included in tribute lists with both the Nahuatl name, Amatenango, and the Tzeltal name, Tzobontaghal (Calnek n.d.). The tribute lists of 1761 include 33 families in the *parcialidad*, or Spanish political unit based on an indigenous settlement, of Zacatepec in Amatenango and 75 families in the *parcialidad* of Amatenango (Trens 1957 I:217). The first census done in 1778 shows a total population of 576, with 374 men and 202 women. The racial breakdown is listed as 8 white, 2 negro and mestizo, and 560 Indians (Trens 1957:221). By 1824, the population had increased to 1,620. The present population of 3,179 represents natural growth as well as inclusion of additional outlying settlements added in the latter part of the nineteenth century and during the 1930s with the enactment of the land reform act. The population changes indicate steady but not great increases. The capacity of the town to incorporate additional population has probably passed its peak. The present trend is for out-migration to newly opened ejido lands.

The subdivisions of the town, which provide the framework for administration by the national government, are included in Table 1.

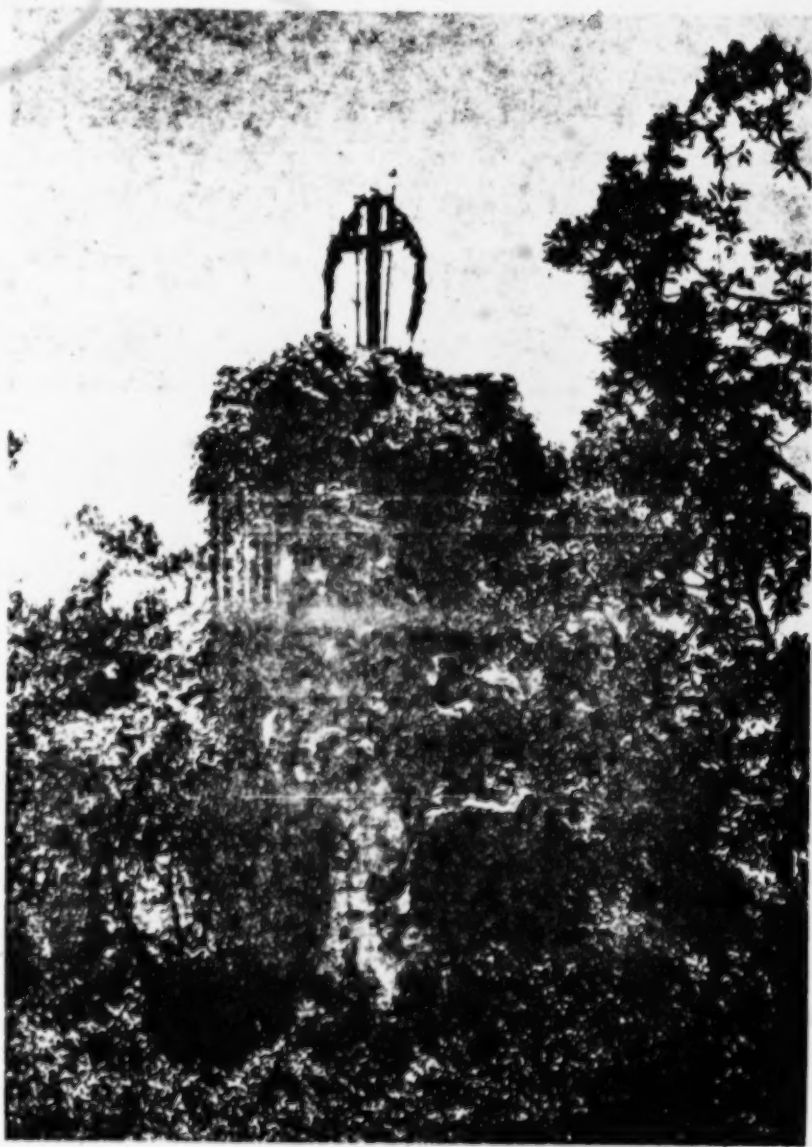
The center. The center of Tzo'ontahal is called the "center [or navel] of the world." The residents of the center, with the exception of the schoolteacher's family, are all Indian. Although the town center forms

(TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970

NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

[P.198-A]



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Plate 1. Head of Palm where the ancestors stand and watch over the town. The cross, standing about twelve feet high and adorned with an arch of pine boughs and flowers, tops a jutting rock about thirty feet high. Behind the rock is the hill with the cave in which the ancestors were reputed to live.

[P 198-B]

• 133
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621
769
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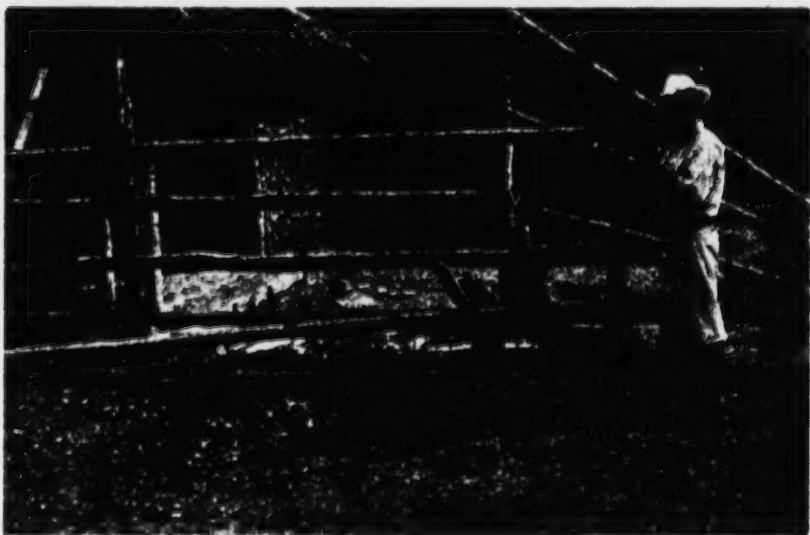
Plate 2. The view the ancestors had of the town from the Head of Palm shows the proximity of the village center to the Pan-American Highway just to the right of center. The church, which can be discerned in the center of the major settlement, is the dividing marker for the dual division. The barrio of Yetawitz is shown just to the left of the major settlement. The barrios of Madronal and La Grandeza are found at the mid-level of the hill in the far left, on the other side of the road which goes to Pinola and "hot country." The Ladino town of Teopisca lies just beyond the hills to the right along the Pan-American Highway. From this site, the ancestors were able to see clearly all of the thoroughfares within the town and guard against the entry of evil.

[P.198-C]



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Plate 3. A father and his two sons, walking in order of age, leave the village to go to their milpa. The father, walking in front, is wearing the old-style costume with a wrapped overshirt concealing short undertrousers. His sons wear western clothing. All of the men carry net bags on a tumpline, with their backs protected from their burdens by a sheepskin. They all carry machetes, and the boys have rifles.



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417
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Plate 4. Farmer showing the arada plow. He is holding the handle, and the shaft, made of a long tree post, is propped on the ground.

8: Hunt E-4,5 (1958)1962

NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango
Aguacatenango

CHAPTER II

THE GENERAL BACKGROUND FOR A CONTROLLED COMPARISON

Geography and Ecology

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131 The communities selected for this study are located in the southwest quarter of the state of Chiapas, which is the southernmost state of the Republic of Mexico. This is a mountainous area belonging to the Sierra Madre Occidental, and a part of the state's Central Plateau. The Plateau Summit of the area is to the north northwest of the villages, and contains the city of San Cristobal las Casas, ex-capital of the state (the present capital, Tuxtla, is in the lowlands).

The villages themselves are situated in the terraced margins of the plateau, which extend to the South into the Grijalva River Depression, and to the north and east into the Lacandon Jungle.

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489
491 The slightly inclined terraces are criss-crossed by several small streams tributary to the Blanco River, and by a complex network of paths, trails, and roads, including a section of the Pan American Highway which connects Mexico City with Guatemala and which is being constructed.

131
36 The villages of Aguacatepango and Amatenango are in two contiguous valleys (see Fig. 1) near to the section of the Pan

8: Hunt E-4,5 (1958)1962

NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango
Aguacatenango

15



Fig. 1.--Physiographic Sketch of the
Valleys of Amatenango, Aguacatenango and
Adjacent Towns.

131 American Highway which connects San Cristobal de las Casas with
361 Comitan. They are 50 and 44 kilometers, respectively, from San
[49] Cristobal. Aguacatenango is closer to the branch road that con-
tinues south from the Highway to Venustiano Carranza, in the low-
lands.

361 Both villages are 2,000 meters above sea level, placed in
• 133 a slightly raised terrain in the valley floor.

139 The vegetation climaxes surrounding the settlements are
the same: woodlands of pine and oak, the second predominating,
grasslands which for the most part are secondary growths in abandoned
agricultural plots, and thorny bushes which the inhabitants of the
valleys utilize for building fences.

241 The range of cultivated plants is the same in the two vil-
139 lages, including several varieties of corn and beans, squash and
a few greens, while other edible plants grow wild in the edges of
streams and rocky places unsuited for cultivation (Kaplan in
McQuown et al., 1959, Part II, Section 6).

134 The soils are mainly limestone base, calcareous clay loam
132 and loam transported, both territories receiving the same amount
132 of rain. Surface water is drained internally within the basin of
132 the Rio Blanco, and in the edges of the village of Aguacatenango,
forms, during the rainy season, a small lagoon, where a variety of
small fish thrive (Wagner, in McQuown et al., 1959, Part II, Sec-
tion 5).

136 The fauna include small deer, ocelots, snakes (poisonous
and non-poisonous), domestic and field rats, and other small
animals.